

New app advises and reminds pregnant women about vaccinations

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Fighting Infections



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A new app to guide and remind pregnant women about vaccines recommended during pregnancy has been launched by researchers.

The Maternal Immunations (MatImms) app is aimed at pregnant women to guide them about infections that could be harmful to them and their baby, such as flu and [whooping cough](#), and which could be prevented by getting vaccinated in pregnancy.

Researchers and clinicians from Imperial College London and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust teamed up to develop the app after becoming concerned about the low uptake of certain vaccines amongst pregnant women.

The app includes a personalised vaccination schedule based on the woman's due date, which can be synced to her phone's calendar, with reminders about when to get her own vaccines and when to vaccinate her baby during the first year of life.

It provides different levels of information about vaccines in general and takes the user on a journey by explaining specifically how women in pregnancy can protect their babies through vaccinations. It explains the concept of protection through maternal antibodies and the general function of the immune system and the placenta. The app also tackles concerns about vaccinations with information on their ingredients and safety records, and it contains links and videos to other websites for further information.

The app's developers were inspired to create MatImms because of the low uptake of the vaccine against whooping cough identified during their research. Whooping cough is the most common cause of death in babies from a vaccine-preventable disease in the UK and an outbreak in 2011-12 resulted in the deaths of 14 infants. A vaccine for pregnant women, introduced in 2012, can protect the baby until it receives its own course of vaccination after two months of age via the national infant immunisation schedule.

However, a survey of 200 pregnant women in London between 2013 and 2014 revealed that over a third of women were not even aware they could have a whooping cough vaccination and only 26 per cent had actually been vaccinated.

Similarly, only 38.5 per cent of pregnant women were vaccinated for flu nationally last year, according to a survey of 7,800 GP practices. Between 2009 and 2012, one in eleven maternal deaths was caused by flu and more than half of these deaths could have been prevented by a flu jab.

When women were surveyed about what would help them to make an informed decision about taking up the recommended vaccines during their pregnancies, the consensus was that the information given to them was not sufficient and many had suggested that a net-based information tool would be more useful than leaflets.

Beate Kampmann, Professor of Paediatric Infection, Immunity and International Child Health at Imperial College London, who led the development of the app, said:

"Whooping cough can have a devastating effect on babies and some continue to die from this [vaccine](#)-preventable disease. The whooping cough vaccination in pregnancy plays an important role in protecting

babies from this infection. However, our research shows that a lack of effective communication is the main reason why women do not take up the recommended vaccinations during pregnancy. Our app aims to address the communication gap by providing a one stop shop for women to get all the information they need on the vaccines available to them during their pregnancy from health care professionals and scientists from Imperial College London. We hope that our app can help raise awareness, increase the numbers of women having the whooping cough and flu vaccines and protect more babies."

Professor Kampmann worked with Marielle Bouqueau, research midwife at St Mary's Hospital, part of Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Dr Beth Holder, Research Associate at Imperial College London to develop the app with input from other members of the Department of Paediatrics at Imperial College London and pregnant women themselves. The project was funded by the NIHR Imperial Biomedical Research Centre. The team will conduct a further study on whether the app is useful to [pregnant women](#) and helps inform their decisions around taking up vaccination during pregnancy.

The [app](#) is available for free and can be used on iPhones and Android devices.

More information: play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.imperial.matimms&hl=en

Provided by Imperial College London

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